PROPOSAL 6:

PROJECT CATEGORY: Decision Support Tool, T and E Species, Adaptive Management, Surrogate Species

FUNDING REQUESTED: FY14: $43K

DELIVERABLES: Multi-regional database that documents the specific methods used to reconstruct prairie grasslands for a management unit. This database will be used to capture methods that are frequently not recorded or are lost, thus limiting our ability to learn from past reconstructions. In Region 3, and to some extent in Region 6, prairie reconstructions (planting native prairie plants on lands formerly under row crop agriculture) are one of the most frequent land management actions employed by refuge managers and they are among the most costly and long-lasting of management actions. Grassland bird populations and many other prairie obligate biota (bees, butterflies, etc.) are in steep decline due to loss of habitat; reconstructions are one tool for slowing this trend and represent a major contribution of the NWRS to supporting these populations. The Eastern Tallgrass Prairie and Big River LCC has selected Henslow's Sparrow, Grasshopper Sparrow, Bobolink, and Upland Sandpiper as surrogate species for grassland habitats. Additionally, reconstructed grasslands have the potential to support Eastern Prairie Fringed Orchids, and several butterfly and dragonfly species in decline. This is the first step in a process that will ultimately involve monitoring protocols to measure the response of these populations to grassland management practices in Regions 3 and 6.

HOW THE DELIVERABLE WILL AFFECT CONSERVATION DELIVERY:
This deliverable supports the 'Conservation Delivery' and the 'Monitoring and Evaluation' steps of SHC. The database will support prairie reconstructions in Regions 3 and 6 and perhaps elsewhere, depending upon interest. We are actively working to develop best practices protocols for prairie reconstructions, but in the meantime, information is being lost regarding the actual practices being used today. This limits our ability to do post-hoc evaluations of the effectiveness of our methods.   The database will support focused research to evaluate the effectiveness of our past reconstructions. It will also be used to support a future adaptive management project focused on informing ongoing management of these restoration sites.

DELIVERABLES IN THE CONTEXT OF THE 7-YEAR PLAN:
AM 1.3 From FY13-FY14, the I&M Initiative will identify and support existing and new AM projects ongoing across the Refuge System, help them be successful, explore possible metrics for tracking achievement of management objectives, explore ways of reporting accomplishments to different audiences, and seek to learn as much as possible from their experiences.

SSM 1.4 Beginning in FY14, where appropriate, the I&M staff will assist with the monitoring process (protocol development, implementation) for surrogate species. This will be an on-going task and will align with the I&M Planning focus area.

LIST COOPERATORS AND PARTNERS: Refuges and Partners for Fish and Wildlife, Regions 3 and 6, USGS, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, Iowa State University, The Nature Conservancy. A team of these cooperators has been working since November 2012 to identify needs and develop focused monitoring and research to address the evaluation of prairie grassland restorations. This database is one of the highest priorities for this team.

SUBMITTED BY: Melinda Knutson